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PHUM.EAID

SUBJECT: FEMALE MUNICIPAL AND VILLAGE COUNCIL MEMBERS
DISCUSS OBSTACLES TO WORK

¶1. Summary. Twelve female Palestinian elected members of municipal and village councils gathered on September 9, for an International Republican Institute-sponsored workshop on local governance and preparing project proposals. The members identified gender discrimination and inadequate resources to fund local organizations and infrastructure projects as problems that they face. End Summary.

Miftah Program: Training Women Political Leaders

¶2. Through a grant to the International Republican Institute (IRI), NEA/PI supports Miftah, a Palestinian NGO that trains elected and civil society female leaders. With the commencement of additional funding, the Miftah program resumed in early September to train on advocacy, lobbying, time management and governance and to hold public meetings in Hebron, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Tulkerem. MEPI coordinator attended a September 9 Jerusalem training on governance and project proposal preparation for twelve elected local council members. All twelve women were muhajiba (covered their hair), and most were 45-60 years old. Several had campaigned for their positions, while others were encouraged (because of their local activism or civil society work) to fill slots created by the quota system. (Note: for the 2004 and 2005 municipal council elections, the Palestinian Authority instituted a quota of a minimum of two seats for women per council.)

Training Content: Democratic Governance

¶3. The training's first hour provided an overview of democratic governance, including the separation of power, each branch's role in a democratic system, and municipal-national issues. The women listened to the presentation attentively and asked questions. In the second hour, trainers addressed municipal level issues and representatives' rights and duties. Participants discussed creating and publicizing budgets to identify any shortfall or excess of funds. Several participants complained about the law requiring the Ministry of Local Governance (MoLG) approval for local projects. Participants said requiring MoLG project approval is unnecessary and inefficient, as the MoLG is not in touch with local needs and takes too long to approve a project, if it responds at all. Several participants expressed an interest in seeing the current law amended to empower local councils.

Lively Discussion of Gender
Discrimination and Fatah-Hamas Conflict

¶4. The discussion was liveliest when the female council members described discrimination from their male colleagues, including being excluded from council meetings. They said male colleagues sometimes think they cannot contribute to discussion of certain issues (i.e., infrastructure and sewage) and do not include them in meetings on these issues. Some women elected by the quota said their fathers or brothers are invited to council meetings in their place.

¶5. Some women council members also said the Fatah-Hamas conflict prevents local councils from functioning effectively. A member of the Jaba municipal council, made up of five Hamas and four Fatah members, said the council has not met in six months, although councils should meet at least four times per month.

Seeking Donor Funding for Small Projects

¶6. The council members were most interested in how to prepare proposals for foreign funding of local development projects, such as small income generation enterprises and computer training for women, and complained that the PA provides local councils little money.

¶7. Comment: While participants seemed to welcome the lesson on governance and the opportunity to air common grievances, this training would have been more useful to participants if it had focused more on practical steps that women council members can take to address gender discrimination and funding gaps. Participants' desire for tangible improvements in the lives and prospects of their constituents was clear. End Comment.

WALLES